

A lousy business - How an ordinary homeopath and mother ended up killing millions - September 2003

by Mary Aspinwall, IS Hom, PCH



Money, money, money

Head lice are big business! In 1995 the UK market for conventional head lice pesticide medicines was worth \$23.5 million (US\$). Just three years later, the figure had more than doubled to \$48.5 million. This points to a fact that many families are discovering: the conventional kill-destroy approach is expensive, and it doesn't work.

When I was at homeopathy college I was told head lice could be successfully gotten rid of with a dose of the homeopathic remedy Staphisagria. I duly tried out that theory and was underwhelmed with the results. Thereafter I always took a full case of the person with head lice and then prescribed the best homeopathic match I could find. This approach seemed to bring better results.

A couple of times in my practice, I came across children who had been dosed with conventional pesticide medicines so often that they seemed to have poisoning symptoms: lethargy, pallor, dark circles under the eyes, loss of appetite, nausea, and weakness. In one case, the homeopathic remedy Nux vomica helped quite spectacularly.

I felt uneasy to think that well-meaning parents were spending large sums of money and were frequently dosing their kids with very poisonous substances, Pyrethrum and Malathion (of DDT fame), often to a level way beyond manufacturer's recommended limits, because of the problem of constant lice reinfestation.

The lice hit home

Despite a worldwide louse epidemic, my own family remained blissfully untouched by the problem for a long time. However, when my daughter reached the age of seven she finally got the little brother she had had on order for a long time. Her only-child world got turned upside down by a boy who found life down here very difficult and made sure we all knew about it! Suddenly she became infested with head lice. Susceptibility is a much-overlooked issue in the lice debate. Why is it that some children and most adults can sit next to someone who is totally infested and emerge unscathed? (Answers on a postcard please ...)

Once we were forced to deal with the problem directly, my husband and I set about investigating the whole subject in depth. Thank God for the Internet, which is a mine of wonderful information at such times. So here is ...

The low-down on lice

The head louse is a beautifully adapted six-legged wingless breeding machine. Having found a new host, it uses its specially adapted legs and claws to grab hold of the hair strands. It will try to stay close to the scalp, often hiding in the thicker hair at the back of the scalp or behind the ears where it bites and feasts on blood. To survive, it will need to feed daily on human blood and live in human hair. Contrary to popular opinion, it will not give a hoot if the hair is clean or filthy provided there is a heart beating somewhere beneath it!

We are family

Adult lice, from around two weeks old, can start to mate. The female begins to lay eggs (nits). They are tear-shaped and pinhead size. Using a natural glue on the hair strands, she sticks the eggs near to the scalp where the warmth of the head will help them to incubate. The unhatched eggs reflect the color of their surroundings making them very difficult to see in dry or wet hair. She may lay 6--10 eggs a day for up to 2 weeks. Do the math and you'll see that could mean up to 140 offspring waiting to happen. Cozy and hidden, her progeny will emerge around 7--10 days later. Once the baby louse has hatched, its empty eggshell will glisten white on the hair, making it easy to spot, but by that time the little critters will already be out and about. In just 7--14 days the louse will molt three times until it is the size of a match-head, then just like Ma and Pa it will start doing the nasty too. $140 \times 140 = 19,600$. How many angels was it that could fit on the head of a pin again?

The road less traveled

So much for know thine enemy. Next we had to decide what to do about it. Philosophically and practically we had seen and heard enough to know that the pesticide route was not the way forward. Such antipathic approaches often cause the original problem to escalate. Over time, more and more medicine is needed just to get the same effect.

Antibiotics have given rise to multi-resistant strains of bacteria, and the use of pesticides has had a similar effect on the head louse. Whatever doesn't kill us makes us stronger, and the same is true for insects and microscopic organisms. Natural treatments such as tea tree oil claim to be safer, and perhaps they are, but they still work on the same premise, namely they kill things by poisoning them. This left one approach, the wet combing method. Initially we tried a very fine-toothed metal comb designed for combing fleas from pets. This caused many a tear before bedtime (mostly mine in pure frustration) and was discarded.

No sex please we're British

The Internet came to our rescue again when we found a charity based in Britain called Community Hygiene Concern. They are not a very sexy charity, concentrating exclusively as they do on head lice and dog mess, so they have to struggle to get any donations or money from public funds. (Toxicara, a parasite, can spread to humans via dog feces, and can cause blindness.) Nevertheless, they were determined to introduce the concept of coitus interruptus to the world of the louse. They had developed a set of five specially-designed, graded combs and a wet combing regimen using ordinary conditioner.

This so-called Bug Busting method was not only a very effective way of determining whether or not someone had lice, but was also an excellent way of getting rid of lice if they did. Like all great ideas, it was beautifully simple: by Bug Busting with these special combs four times every fourth day, you could actually break the lousy life cycle and stop the critters from breeding. The combs were so fine, they even removed the eggs and empty eggshells.

Contacting my inner primate

Reader, I bought the Bug Busting kit, followed the instructions (rare enough for me), and got combing. I felt like a big mama gorilla and really got into the grooming thing, but the moral dilemma remained. Of course, there was nothing to say that I had to kill those bugs once I'd combed them right outta her hair, but setting them free in the garden would just have meant a slow death from starvation. So I confess I just squished them on some tissue and threw them on the fire. I admire their powers of adaptation and feel they still have a good chance of inheriting the earth, but if I have to choose between a bunch of thirsty bloodsuckers and my beloved daughter ... it is a no-brainer. So to cut a long bit of self-justifying rambling short, to my utter relief, the Bug Busting kit actually did what it said on the box.

Contacting my inner entrepreneur

I was so impressed I bought 1000 ... that's the kind of girl I am. I think it's genetic. When my grandfather died he left a legacy of hundreds of bristle toothbrushes. I guess it seemed like a good idea at the time (just after World War II). Not wanting to leave a similar legacy, with the help of my techno whiz kid husband I wrote to every elementary school and health board in Ireland to tell them of our discovery, and soon after, we started mailing out the comb kits to desperate parents.

They liked them. What's not to like? They are cheap. One kit can treat loads of kids. Your kids don't risk getting poisoned. The lice are history. The parents told their friends and parents' associations. I started being invited to speak on regional and national radio shows, and we started to get big orders from health boards and schools who wanted to encourage simultaneous Bug Busting efforts to cut down the risk of reinfestation.

Live and let die

That was all many moons and several thousand Bug Buster kits ago. So now here I sit at my laptop ... a mass murderer and that's why I'm praying that next life I don't come back as a *Pediculus capitis*.

*To find out more about Bug Busting, visit <http://www.chc.org/bugbusting/>

About the author:

Mary Aspinwall studied at the London College of Homeopathy and is a Dynamis School graduate. She is a Registered member of the Irish Society of Homeopaths. In 1992 she designed the best-selling Helios Double Helix homeopathic medicine kits for home use, foreign travel, and childbirth and wrote *A Basic Guide to Homeopathy*. She now has a large, busy holistic health center in the South West of Ireland, teaches for the Irish School of Homeopathy, and together with her saintly husband runs www.homeopathyworld.com. You can read more of her cases and articles there.